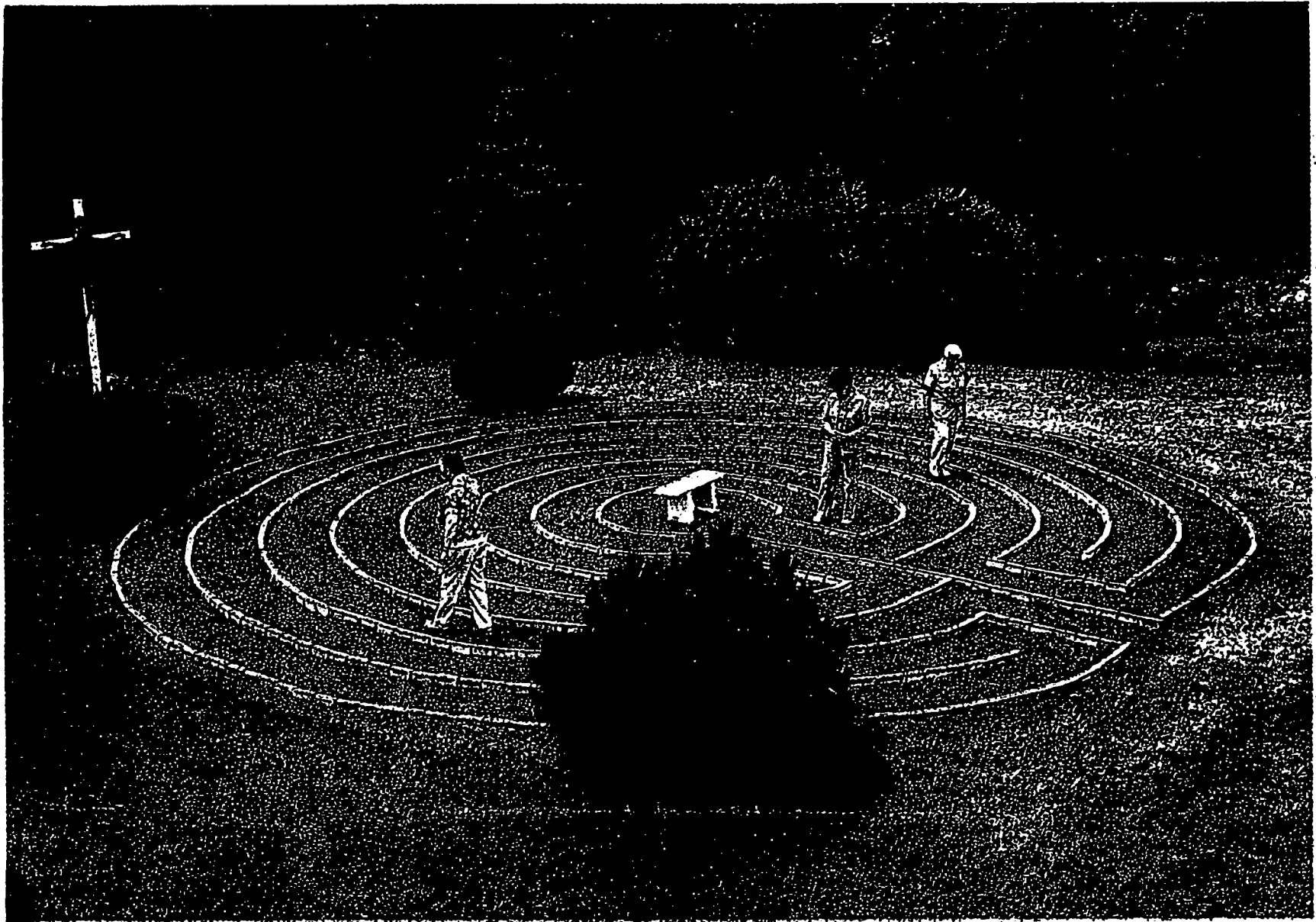


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PHOTOS BY TOM HERDE/GLOBE STAFF

In retreat mode

Miramar Center in Duxbury offers harried people a chance to slow the pace of life, and change direction

By Sandy Coleman
GLOBE STAFF

A retired New Bedford teacher wanted to learn the art of forgiveness. A Plymouth home-renovations worker wanted to keep his struggle with gambling behind him. A busy Duxbury psychotherapist just craved time to slow down, think, and reflect.

As diverse as their quests were, they all found what they needed in one place — the Miramar Retreat Center, a 30-acre spiritual haven in Duxbury overlooking Kingston Bay (“miramar” in Spanish means view of the sea). Since 1949, the facility on Parks Street has welcomed visitors from diverse racial, religious, and professional backgrounds. They arrive seeking everything from a closer relationship with God to a healthier relationship with food.

About 5,000 people a year lounge in comfortable wing-back chairs in the dark wood-paneled main house, take in views of the bay from one of its 30 double-capacity guest rooms, meditate before a Buddha in a garden bursting with flowers, and walk the winding path of the outdoor labyrinth that helps them make sense of the twists and turns in their lives. With the start of fall, the retreat’s rental season picks up among



The Rev. Tom Griffith, a staff member at the Miramar Center, says: “A lot of wounded people come here.”

the many disparate seekers who find their way to the facility.

For the past five years, Overeaters Anonymous has held once-a-year retreats for members at the center. Gamblers Anonymous holds weekly meetings there. Alcoholics Anonymous holds retreats twice a year. In the past, the Women’s Theological Center in Boston has

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TAKE A TOUR

Watch our video at www.boston.com/globe/south for an inside look at the Miramar Retreat Center.

Symbol for life’s journey

The **labyrinth** on the grounds of the Miramar Retreat Center (above) plays an important role in the daily reflection that goes on inside the Duxbury haven.

Designed and executed by the Rev. Edward Dudink, the center’s gardening mastermind, and Sister Catherine

Griffiths, a director at the center, the labyrinth is an **invitation to meditate and pray**.

Its single path is a continuous circle that **meanders with**

purpose and is symbolic of life’s

journey with all of the twists and turns and search for meaning. It

has been known to civilization for more than 4,000 years but often is confused with a maze. Unlike the

labyrinth, a maze is a puzzle full of tricks and dead ends. The

labyrinth has a single path into and out of its center. The goal is to

quiet the meditating mind, not confuse it.

Miramar offers weekend and weeklong retreats as well as theme-based day programs. Directed and guided retreats involve spiritual guidance based on the Scriptures. Individuals may take personal directed retreats in which they meet with a director daily but spend most of their time in prayer and quiet. Participants in guided retreats meet with facilitators for conferences.

There are also special retreats — one of them 30 days long — that provide sabbaticals for priests or special time for married couples and for firefighters. Prices range from \$20 for a quiet day of prayer (lunch included) to \$395 for a five- to six-day directed retreat. The center states that, although yoga and massages are available, it is important to remember it is not a spa.

Many people say they find Miramar through word of mouth. The Society of the Divine Word, a Roman Catholic missionary congregation of more than 6,000 priests and brothers serving in 60 countries worldwide, owns the property, which previously served as a seminary. The first retreats were held in 1949 and were offered to engaged couples.

Miramar's offerings have expanded over the years to include daylong and weeklong retreats for both lay people and religious orders, days of prayer, and spiritual programs for both engaged couples and married couples with rocky relationships. Many outside organizations rent rooms to hold meetings.

The rental fees help support the center, which recently held a fund-raising gala as part of its ongoing effort to build an endowment fund for its \$1 million annual operating budget.

Although many Duxbury residents know Miramar best for its sled hill facing Bay Road, local mothers, seniors, school groups, and firefighters all have benefited from the center's services, including daily Mass and spiritual programs.

her perfectly; "Mini Retreat Days for Busy Women."

Initially, she struggled with whether she could clear her Monday schedule to fit in a 4½-hour day of muffins, personal sharing, and reflection. In the end, she decided it was important enough. She has now gone to three sessions and plans to attend one this month with the theme, "Autumn: A Time to Let Go and Let God."

"With the work I'm doing, I'm giving a lot," Campbell said. "The retreat is one of the ways I like to use to replenish myself. I really like having those times to sort of slow down and open to spirit. When I go to that place, I find that I get replenished and I really get connected and I feel great."

She said the "magic" would come when she is on her own in a chair on the grounds, in the chapel, or in one of the retreat rooms, and she is usually inspired to write something.

"I sort of feel like I come to God with a question, and I take my pen and get some automatic answer," she said. "I love the things that come through."

During a recent session, she penned a few lines she called "Just to be is a blessing." She wrote, "Trust this time. Just be in it. Be in the unknown. Be in the spiraling of energy. Be in the uncertainty of so many things. Open further and deeper . . . and just Be. . . . Live freely, and openly, and courageously. Be the you that you know wants to exist."

"Mini Retreat Days for Busy Women" was started last fall by Sister Maureen Casey following a conversation she had with a nun from Japan about the fact that there are two words for "busy" in Japanese. One means "good busy" and indicates a nourishing of the heart, while the other means "bad

'I sort of feel like I come to God with a question, and I take my pen and get some automatic answer. I love the things that come through.'

NANCY CAMPBELL, *psychotherapist from Duxbury*

Taking a breath and slowing life's pace



TOM HERDE/GLOBE STAFF

On the grounds at the center, individuals may lounge in the wood-paneled main house, take in views of the bay from one of its 30 double-capacity guest rooms, meditate in a garden bursting with flowers, and walk the winding path of the outdoor labyrinth.

busy" because it destroys the heart, Casey said.

The mini retreat helps women weed out the "bad busy" from their lives, she said.

"Sometimes it has caused some women to even examine where their lives are going and where they are putting their energy and whether that is what they want to spend their lives doing," Casey said.

Some people who visit Miramar already know they are, or have been, on the wrong life path. Take, for example, the two dozen or so members of Gamblers Anonymous who rent space. They don't avail themselves of religious programs. But just having a quiet place to gather is essential for the group, said one member who said it has helped turn his life around.

"I won't tell you a dollar amount, but it took me 23½ years to pay off my gambling debt," said

the member, John, a Plymouth resident who asked that his last name not be used. "The fellowship is what has helped me."

Andrew Glenn, a Marshfield fisherman and father of two teenagers, goes on retreat once a year at Miramar with a group of friends.

"To me, it's like hallowed ground," he said. "It gives me a weekend to kick back and reflect on things and get right with the man upstairs."

And that, Mallonee said, can solve a lot of problems.

"Good people do good things. If you are at peace with yourself, you will be at peace with the world."

For more information about the Miramar Retreat Center, visit www.miramarretreat.org.

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